



BREITUNG TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

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Dear State Board of Education Members:

The Upper Peninsula school districts are strongly in support of the State Board's and Department of Education's initiative to shape and conduct a comprehensive adequacy study. We applaud your efforts to not only determine the funding requirement for a high quality Michigan Public Education System but also to analyze best management practices for utilization of resources. We would hope that equity would also be a part of that study. Why should the foundation grant for Breitung Township Schools students be \$1,300.00 less than many other students in the state?

Many Upper Peninsula school districts have not only been faced with flat funding for the past three years but have had to deal with declining enrollment at the same time. Many difficult decisions have been made to deal with this situation. U.P. districts have:

- ▶ Consolidated – most recently Wakefield and Marenisco
- ▶ Cooperated – business services, transportation, sharing teachers, sharing social workers, distance learning
- ▶ Subcontracted – bussing, custodial, food service, and administration
- ▶ Closed school buildings – Escanaba, for instance, has closed five (5) of their nine (9) elementary buildings in order to address their budget shortfall.
- ▶ Frozen salaries

“Teaching - Learning - Sharing All Enhanced by Caring”

- ▶ Employee participation in health insurance
- ▶ Cut teaching, support staff, and administrative positions
- ▶ Cut professional development – in a time where it is most needed with the challenges of NCLB requirements and Education Yes
- ▶ Cut experiences for students – i.e., field trips
- ▶ Implemented student fees
- ▶ Cut classroom supplies
- ▶ Increased class sizes
- ▶ Cut textbook purchases
- ▶ Put technology purchases on hold
- ▶ Eliminated curricular offerings – A.P. classes, foreign languages, art, music, physical education
- ▶ Cut school nurses, social workers, and guidance counselors – again at a time where they are more and more critical
- ▶ Shortened the school year
- ▶ Shortened the school week

U.P. school districts, their staffs and administrators continue to do more with less. Our concern is that our ability to do more or even continue to provide a high quality education is eroding.

The Breitung Township Board of Education has made many proactive decisions in the past which have enabled us to deal with this funding issue up until this point. Several of those decisions were:

- ▶ In the late 80's, the district merged four (4) elementary schools into our present elementary school.

- ▶ In 1990, the district subcontracted transportation which it continues and created a Public Improvement Fund to be used for major maintenance.
- ▶ In 1994, employees began to contribute to the cost of their health insurance. Today, it amounts to 15% of the premium and the Board has saved more than \$2 million via employee sharing.
- ▶ From the 2000-2001 school year to the present, twenty-one (21) teachers retired or resigned and have not been replaced. Granted some of these teachers were not replaced due to our declining enrollment but you do not eliminate twenty-one (21) teaching positions for 205 fewer students over that period of time.
- ▶ Budget cuts of \$2 million plus over the last three (3) years and a budget cut of \$1.25 million looming for the 2005-2006 school year. Our Board has done these things but still faces a declining enrollment of 30-40 students per year and a 3% fund balance for 2005-2006.

Most of us went into education to do “what’s best for students.” When I was hired for my current job, I held onto that same philosophy that every decision that we made should be based on “what’s best for students.” However, in the last two (2) years, decisions have been made strictly on finances or lack of the same, not on “what’s best for our students”.

Superintendents have expertise on how to create a quality school district. We are now being asked to do something that we have no expertise at, that being the dismantling of quality school districts brick by brick.

Cutting programs and people will not solve the problem. Cutting is just a “band-aid.” We are doing exactly what the State has been doing. As the Superintendent of the St. Ignace Area Schools, Pete

Everson mentioned, "With cuts so deep, how will we ever recover or have enough financial resources to replace the things we know are essential to a solid, basic educational program."

The State Board and the Department of Education have started the ball rolling. Hopefully, it will pick up speed. Yes, we need to have dialogue but we need action soon. The clock is ticking and many fine, quality districts in the U.P. and across the state have their backs against the wall.

Sincerely,

Robert W. Staple
Superintendent